Ranglong

Ranglong language is a Kuki-Chin language of India and Burma. It is also recorded as Langrong by UNESCO and declared as critically endangered language.

The Ranglong language is also known as "Riam chong".

Ranglong	
Langrong	
Native to	India
Region	Tripura, Assam, Mizoram
Ethnicity	Halam tribe
Native speakers	8,000 (2003)[1]
Language family	Sino-Tibetan ▪ Kuki-Chin ▪ **Ranglong**
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	rnl
Glottolog	rang1267 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/rang1267)[2]

Distribution

Ranglong language is spoken in Seisimdung, Noagang, Zoitang, Lungkam, Zoinogor, Muolhui, Enhui, Vomthat, Kheuri-laikhuo, Rothabil, Laikhuo, Sorospur, Thumsip, Balidung, Ru-at, Saitha, Zarolian, villages in Tripura, Nurka, Langkhanphong, Pipla, Zairal, Sobiri, Khulicherra, Jugicherra, Salganga, Kaisanary, Jamira villages in Assam and Luimawi village in Mizoram. The Ranglong people lives in a close and compact yet divided by three Indian federal states.

Who are the Ranglongs?

The term ‘Ranglong’ is also simultaneously used as ‘Langrong’ by different scholars and writers. For instance, GH Damant, in his book ‘Notes on the locality and Population of the Tribes Dwelling between the Brahmaputra and Ningthi Rivers’ published in 1880, by Stanford University, USA, in the ‘Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland’ and GA Grierson, in his research work, ‘The Linguistic Survey of India’ Vol. III, Part-III, published in 1904, by Kalpaz Publication, New Delhi, used the term Ranglong.

Whereas, CA Soppitt, in his publication on ‘A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribe on the North-East Frontier’ published in 1887, by Harvard University, USA, TC Hodson, in ‘The Naga Tribes of Manipur’ published in 1911, by University of London, and Colonel Shakespeare, in ‘The Lushei Kuki Clan’ published in 1912, by University of California, USA, used the term Langrong. At present, the speakers identify themselves with the term ‘Ranglong,’ although some of their correlated ethnic tribes like Mizo, Thado etc., still called them ‘Langrong.’

GH Damant categorised the Ranglong with ‘Old Kukis’ of the greater Tibeto-Burman Family (Damant, ibid, 1880: 237). Some of the ethnic tribes of Old Kukis are Bete, Khelma, Rangkhol, Aimol, Chiru, Ranglong etc. The term ‘Old and New Kuki’ is used to categorise and identify them in relation to their period of migration and contact with the plain population of the present northeast India.

Thus, the ‘Old Kukis’ are the first and the ‘New Kukis’ the latter, among the Kuki-Chin groups who migrated in their present areas of settlement and make contact with the plain population. In trying to distinguish the two Kukis, GA Grierson further said, ‘Not only do their customs and institutions differs considerably, but their languages are separated by a large group of dialects in the Lushai and Chin Hills. The

so-called New Kukis are, so far as we can see, a Chin tribe, most closely related to the inhabitants of the Northern Chin Hills, while the Old Kukis are related the tribes more to the south' (GA Grierson, ibid, 1904: 2).

The Ranglong being an Old Kuki, its origin and phases of migration is the same as other Kuki-Chin ethnic groups. There is enough literature within the academic circle regarding the migratory route of the Kuki-Chin groups. They were believed to have migrated from some part of China provinces, to Myanmar and to present northeast India. Till now, the Ranglongs would chant in their folk song called 'Nei omna Durnai phai,' meaning 'our place of settlement is Durnai valley.' The term 'Durnai valley' is believed to be the Kabaw Valley of present Myanmar (Burma). There is no tangible evidence why the Ranglongs migrated from the Kabaw valley of Burma. GH Damant said that the so called Kukis 'are migratory race, living by jhum cultivation and preferring the densest forests' (GH Damant, ibid, 1880: 237). After their migration from Kabaw valley, they entered Champhai district of present Mizoram, the then Lushai Hills, approximately around 1200 to 1300 A.D.

They further move towards Churachanpur district of present Manipur, and settled in and around the confluence of river 'Tiruong and Tivai,' which is commonly known as 'Tipai(mukh)' in Bengali (it is also call Tuiruong and Tuivai. Ti/Tui indicates water). The accent of the term 'Tivai got changed to 'Tipai' in Bengali, and the confluence of 'Tiruong and Tivai,' got the name 'Tipaimukh.' The two rivers joined together and flow towards western direction and finally got the name 'Barak' in Barak valley of Assam. In memory of those old settlements the Ranglongs would chant, 'Rili Champhai Zol,' meaning 'Rili Champhai plains,' 'Rili' is also termed as 'Rihdil' by various Kuki-Chin groups. 'Li/Dil' means a lake or pond in Kuki-Chin language. It (Rili) is a big lake in present Myanmar, adjoining Champhai revenue district of present Mizoram and occupies an important place in the history and culture of Kuki-Chin ethnic groups. They still have a sense of belonging to that lake because of its direct linkages with their social history. Again, the Ranglong would also chant 'Ruonglevaisuo kati,' which means 'in the bank of the confluence of river Tiruong and Tivai where we used to settle.'

The settlement of Ranglong in the confluence of river Tiruong and Tivai (Tipaimukh) may be approximately in between 1500 to 1600 A.D. From there, they follow the downstream of the river till present Barak Valley and thereafter dispersed in different direction. Considerable numbers of the Ranglong populations had even migrated to the extent of Sylhet district of present Bangladesh. This is evident from GA Grierson's comparison of the population of Ranglong language speakers in Sylhet and North Cachar Hills (GA Grierson, ibid, 1904: 207). From Sylhet most of them came back following the river 'Langkei' which is 'Longai' in Bengali version (the etymology of 'Langkei' is elaborated in the next section), river Juri in present North Tripura district, and river Dhalai in Dhalai district of Tripura.

Present settlements of Ranglong:

The present settlement of Ranglong is found in three states - Tripura, Assam and Mizoram, having a population of approximately 12000 (twelve thousand). It is ambiguous whether Ranglong speakers are still in existence in Sylhet district of Bangladesh, Manipur and Myanmar. As of now, there is limited information about their existence in these mentioned regions. In the state of Tripura, they are mainly concentrated in the hilly terrain of the North Tripura revenue district, under Dharmanagar and Panisagar revenue sub-division, bordering Assam, and in Dhalai district of Tripura. The locations of most of the Ranglong villages in Tripura are found in adjoining National Highway No. 08 (eight) with few exceptions having a distance of five to ten kilometer away from the said National Highway. Considerable numbers of 'Langkei' and 'Dap' clan of Ranglong community are also found in few interior villages of Kamalpur and Ambassa revenue sub-division of Dhalai revenue district of Tripura. In Assam, they are concentrated in Patherkandi revenue circle of

Karimganj district, mostly in the bank of the river Longai bordering Tripura and Mizoram. Few villages are also under Katlicherra revenue circle of Hailakandi district, and Sonai revenue circle of Cachar district of Assam. In Mizoram, the Ranglongs settled in Zawlnuam sub-division of Mamit district.

The Ranglongs have settled in their present areas of settlement for last 400 (four hundred) to 500 (five hundred) years approximately. It is evident from the name of places in their locality that is being officially recognised till date by the government of Assam, Tripura and Mizoram. For instance, there is a river called 'Longai' used as inter-state boundary among the three mentioned Indian federated states. This river connects Patherkandi revenue circle of Karimganj district of Assam, Panisagar revenue sub-division in north Tripura and Mamit revenue district of Mizoram. The term 'Longai' is a Bengali version of Ranglong terminology called 'Langkei.' Because of linguistics unfamiliarity of the plain populations, the accent of 'Langkei' got changed into 'Longai.' In fact, the word 'Langkei' is nothing but is one of the names of Ranglong clan. Till now, Langkei is the major clan among the Ranglong Community. Within the native dwellers and even by the government of Mizoram the river is still recognised as Langkei rather than the tainted version. Since they are believed to be the first settler in the bank of river Langkei, the river ultimately got the name cognate with the native dwellers. Similarly, there is a name of locality officially called 'Solgoi' in present Patherkandi revenue circle of Karimganj revenue district of Assam. It is a wrong accent of Ranglong terminology called 'Solngui,' which is nothing but a name of flower found naturally in that area and that particular area got the name after 'Solngui' flower. The Ranglongs once settled in Solgoi areas before moving the upstream of river Langkei (Longai) bordering Mizoram and Tripura.

Ranglong as a distinct Community: Past and Present:

Unfortunately, the Ranglong community has become the minority of the minorities in their present respective Indian federated states. The Ranglong language has also been declared by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a critically endangered language among the 197 (one hundred ninety seven) languages in India (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, MHRD, 6th Aug. 2014). Evidently, this ethnic community is also very much a victim of amalgamation and delimitation of Indian Territory after Independence. However, it has to be mention that the Ranglongs had been identified as a separate community having separate identity by various renowned scholars. GH Damant put the Ranglong Community under Old Kuki as against Bete, Khelma and Rangkhol Community (GH Damant, ibid, 1880: 237). CA Soppit also clearly mentioned about the community of Ranglong (CA Soppit, ibid, 1887: 3). GA Grierson had again identified the Ranglong as separate community and accordingly undertook detailed linguistic research on Ranglong language (GA Grierson, ibid, 1904: 207-213). TC Hodson also identified the Ranglong as separate community as against Halam, Rangkhol etc., and put it under Old Kuki group (TC Hodson, ibid, 1911: 19).

Besides, Colonel Shakespeare highlights the Ranglong as distinct to other tribal languages (Colonel Shakespeare, ibid, 1912: 225). Kenneth VanBik, in his research works on, 'Proto-Kuki-Chin: A Reconstructed Ancestor of the Kuki-Chin Language' grouped the Ranglong with Old Kuki as against Halam, Rangkhol, Aimol etc., (Kenneth VanBik 2009: 20). MK Bhasin, in his research works, 'Genetics of Castes and Tribes of India: Indian Population Milieu' also clearly identify the Ranglong as separate community alongside Lushai/Mizo, Rangkhol, Halam etc., (MK Bhasin 2006: 268).

At present, the status of the community is such that it has no official recognition in their respective federated states as Ranglong. The respective state administration has rather merged them with different communities. The Ranglongs in Tripura has been merged with Halam and Tripuri Community, whereas in Assam with the Kuki, Rangkhol/Hrangkhawl and Tripuri Community. In Mizoram they were merged with Rangkhol/Hrangkhawl and any other Mizo tribes (as per the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders 'Amendment' Act 1976). The repercussion is that maximum of the Ranglongs are using the new

community, with whom they were merged, as their surname. The serious irony is that, those communities grouped under Old Kuki alongside Ranglong, like Bete, Khelma, Rangkhol, Aimol, Chiru etc., have been recognised as separate tribal community since Indian Independence. Unfortunately, the existence of Ranglong Community has deteriorated to the point of extinction.

Conclusion:

Considering their merger with different communities in three federated states in India, the Ranglong community is passing through serious identity crisis. They are officially compelled to identify themselves to a community with which the state government had merged them. However, young and learned generations of the Ranglongs have been slowly and steadily recuperating its past identity in the recent years. It is found that they have been very vocal on their distinct identity as 'Ranglong' and acknowledged their common identity through diverse socio-cultural activities. The Ranglong Youth Association (RYA), a registered association under Societies Registration Act, 1860, and the only umbrella organisation, have been playing a big role for the socio-cultural uplift of the Ranglong community since its inception in 1994. There is anticipation among the Ranglongs that unless the respective state administration does not take some proactive measures to establish and locate the fact they would continue to be victims of injustice.

THE OLD KUKI TRIBES IN TRIPURA: Ranglong,Hrangkhol and Hallam

The tribes belonging to the Chin and Kuki are one and the same people who were collectively identified as 'Kuki' in India and 'Chin' in Burma. The first reference to the term 'Kuki' was made in 1777 A.D. in connection to the tribesmen who attacked the British subjects in Chittagong when Warren Hastings was made the Governor General of Bengal (Gangmumei Kamei, Ethnicity and Social Change: An Anthology of Essay, Imphal: PC Jain and Co., 2002: p. 25). There are many surmises and theories about the origin of the word 'Kuki.' Some believe that it has been derived from the Baluchistan word 'Kuchi' meaning wondering people. Some other said that it comes from the word 'Kooky' meaning peculiar or unusual people (Aheibam Koireng Singh, The Kuki Identity then and now, Manipur Times, Nov.18, 2016). S. Prim Vaiphei believes that it was a derogatory name given to the outsiders to an ethnic group of people living in western Burma, North East Indian and Bangladesh (S Prim Vaiphei, eds., 'The Kukis' N Sanajaoba, Manipur: Past and Present, Vol. 3, New Delhi: Mittal, 1995, p.126).

The term 'Old Kuki and New Kuki' had been categorised and being identified in relation to their period of migration and contact with the plain population of the present northeast India. Thus, the 'Old Kukis' are the first and the 'New Kukis' the latter, among the Kuki-Chin groups who migrated in the present northeastern states and make contact with the so called 'plain population.' In trying to distinguish the two Kukis, G.A. Grierson further said, 'Not only do their customs and institutions differs considerably, but their languages are separated by a large group of dialects in the Lushai and Chin Hills. The so-called New Kukis are, so far as we can see, a Chin tribe, most closely related to the inhabitants of the Northern Chin Hills, while the Old Kukis are related the tribes more to the south' (G.A. Grierson, Linguistics Survey of India, Vol. III, Part III, 1904: p. 2).

According to G.H. Damant, the 'Ranglong, Bete, Khelma and Rangkhol' were the Old Kukis (GH Damant, 'Notes on the locality and Population of the Tribes Dwelling between the Brahmaputra and Ningthi River,' in the Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, USA: Stanford University, 1880, p.237). According to T.C. Hodson, the 'Ranglong, Rangkhol, Bete, Hallam, Aimol, Kolren, Kom, Cha, Mhar, Anal, Hiroi-Lamgang and Purum' were identified as belonging to the Old Kuki (T.C. Hodson, 'The Naga Tribes of Manipur' London: Macmillan and Co. 1911, p. 19). Again, according to Kenneth VanBik, the 'Ranglong, Aimol, Chiru, Purum, Kom, Hrangkhol, Hallam, Kolhreng, Luhupa, Tarau, Anal, Biate,

Vaiphei etc) were categorised as Old Kuki (Kenneth VanBik, 'Proto-Kuki-Chin: A reconstructed ancestor of the Kuki-Chin languages' in 'STEDP Monograph Series' Berkeley: University of California, 2009, p. 20). At present, it is bewildering to clearly categorise the Old Kuki and New Kuki considering the present socio-cultural setting among hill tribes. As per the Scheduled Tribes Orders Second (Amendment) Acts, 2002, the Government of India identifies some tribal community in the northeastern states under Kuki and not necessary as Old Kuki and New Kuki.

As per the identification and categorisation of Old Kuki tribes by the above mentioned scholars there are three tribes found in Tripura. They are 'Ranglong, Rangkhol and Hallam.' According to the record of the Scheduled Tribes List, Government of India, most of the other so called Old Kuki tribes are at present found in Manipur and Assam and few of them are also found in Mizoram (for further information please see Scheduled Tribes Orders Second (Amendment) Acts, 2002, Government of India). However, the official recognition of the Old Kuki tribes in Tripura is now in different forms. The Ranglong tribe is now merged with Halam, the Rangkhol/Hrangkhawl with Kuki and the Hallam/Halam is directly recognised as Halam tribe. As the earlier scholars grouped both the 'Ranglong and Hallam' under Old Kuki, it could be inferred that the migratory route of the two Old Kuki tribes must be same. Hence, it can be further surmised that there must have been huge magnitude of population intermixture in between the two tribes. S.B.K. Dev Varman rightly said, 'They came into contact with the ruling dynasty of the day and accepted the suzerainty of the kings of Tripura. They are known as 'Mila Kukis' also. The Kukis call them 'Ranglong' (S.B.K Dev Varman, 'The tribes of Tripura: A dissertation,' Directorate of Research, Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 2004, p.35.

As the Ranglong are officially merged with Halam, regardless of the Ranglong being identified as a separate tribe against Halam under Old Kuki by so many renowned scholars (as stated above), maximum of the Ranglongs had used Halam as their surname. But as the Ranglongs recuperates its past distinct identity, they have gradually started using the tribe's name (Ranglong) as their surname. At present, the Ranglongs are having well awareness about their distinct identity as a separated tribe. They have been acknowledging their identity as Ranglong in different socio-cultural activities. They have their own distinct and organised customary law called 'Halamasa' (for more information about 'Halamasa' please see 'Khurpuitabum: An Introduction to the History of Ranglong,' published by Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Govt. of India, 2014, pp. 37-46) which is a customary law given by the then Tripura Maharajas. It has been practiced for last fifty years (approximately) and major disputes within themselves are solved and adjudicated on the basis of their customary law. In fact, internal disputes among themselves hardly reach the general court, accepting few cases that are beyond the capacity to solve by village level council.

Although the Ranglongs well understood that many renowned scholars identify and categorised the two tribes – 'Ranglong and Halam' as distinct and separate (for reference and further information relating to the tribes of 'Ranglong and Halam' as separate and distinct to each other please see T.C. Hodson, ibid, p. 19, Kenneth VanBik, ibid, p. 20, and M.K. Basin 'Genetics of Castes and Tribes of India: Indian Population Milieu,' in 'Int J Hum Genet,' Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 233-274), they (Ranglong) still identify themselves as Halam relating to any official matter that is beyond the purview of the Ranglong tribes So, many Ranglongs (accepting some of them) who identifies himself/herself as 'Ranglong' within his/her locality unfortunately identify himself/herself again as 'Halam' if he/she is physically outside or beyond the local areas and especially among the non-Scheduled Tribes populace. For instance, if one Ranglong from Koileng (Bagbasa) of North Tripura identify himself/herself as 'Ranglong' within that locality, he/she may again identify himself/herself as belonging to Halam tribes after reaching Dharmanagar town of North Tripura. In short, one person is having dual identity depending upon the situation in hand. This is not to be taken by surprise, because as the Ranglong tribe is officially merged with Halam tribe, few peoples outside the

inhabited areas of Ranglong really knew about the separate existence of Ranglong tribes. Hence, for any official purpose and for making any sorts of official correspondence they have to identify themselves as Halam for making things easier.

In view of the above complexity, some pertinent questions arise: How long will the Ranglong further maintain this dual identity which they have to temporarily accept due to certain compulsion? Can the record of the Colonial Historians regarding the identification and categorisation of tribes be officially ignored in the days to come? What would be the observation of the educated young generation Ranglongs who are well aware of their present identity crisis? These questions are very complicated where inferences could not be drawn easily. There is, therefore, huge scope for the researcher and scholars who are interested to undertake research on ethnography and Historiography study in Tripura.

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